

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 10, 2009

"In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a pre-requisite. That is why it will be the goal of this Administration to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education – from the day they are born to the day they begin a career."

– President Barack Obama

Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009

Providing a high-quality education for all children is critical to America's economic future. Education has always been the foundation for achieving the American dream, providing opportunity to millions of American families, newcomers, and immigrants. Our nation's economic competitiveness depends on providing every child with an education that will enable them to compete in a global economy that is predicated on knowledge and innovation.

Progress toward this goal requires a race to the top to reform our nation's schools. It requires holding schools accountable for helping all students meet world-class standards aligned to the demands of the 21st century workforce. It requires solutions for schools to close the achievement gap, and strategies to accelerate the learning of those that are the furthest behind. It requires new reforms to promote effective teaching and attract the best and brightest into the profession. It requires a national strategy to confront America's persistent dropout crisis, and strengthen transitions to college and career.

President Obama's agenda will improve outcomes for students at every point along the educational pipeline.

Early Education: A Strong Foundation for Success

Research demonstrates that the years before kindergarten comprise the most critical time in a child's life to influence educational outcomes. It's time that our nation make the early investments that will transform lives, create opportunity and save money in the long term

- President Obama is committed to helping states develop seamless, comprehensive, and coordinated "Zero to Five" systems to improve developmental outcomes and early learning for all children.
- In the 2010 budget, Early Learning Challenge Grants will encourage states to raise the bar on the quality of early education, upgrade workforce quality, and drive improvements across multiple federal, state, and local funding streams.
- Incentive grants to states will support data collection across programs (Head Start, child care, Pre-kindergarten, and other early learning settings), push for uniform quality standards, and step-up efforts for the most disadvantaged children.

K-12: Fostering a Race to the Top

To excel in the global economy, we must adopt world-class standards, assessments, and accountability systems to upgrade the quality of teaching and learning in America's classrooms.

- The President encourages an end to the practice of low-balling state reading and math standards, and will promote efforts to enhance the rigor of state-level curriculum to better foster critical thinking, problem solving, and the innovative use of knowledge needed to meet 21st century demands.
- He will push to end the use of ineffective "off-the-shelf" tests, and promote the development of new, state-of-the-art data and assessment systems that provide timely and useful information about the learning and progress of individual students.
- With funding provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the U.S. Department of Education will work with states to upgrade data systems to track students progress and measure the effectiveness of teachers.

Teachers are the single most important resource to a child's learning. America must re-invest in the teaching profession by recruiting mid-career professional and ensuring that teachers have the world's best training and preparation. We must take action to improve teaching in classrooms that need it most, while demanding accountability and performance.

- The President will teacher quality by dramatically expanding successful performance pay models and rewards for effective teachers, scaling up federal support for such programs in up to an additional 150 school districts nationwide.
- He supports improved professional development and mentoring for new and less effective teachers, and will insist on shaping new processes to remove ineffective teachers.
- The President supports a new, national investment in recruiting the best and brightest to the field of teaching, and will invest in scaling-up innovative teacher preparation and induction models.

Driving Innovation and Expecting Excellence

America's schools must be incubators of innovation and success. Where charter schools are successful, states should be challenged to lift arbitrary caps and make use of successful lessons to drive reform throughout other schools.

- President Obama will encourage the growth of successful, high-quality charter schools, and challenge states to reform their charter rules and lift limits that stifle growth and success among excellent schools.
- The President supports rigorous accountability for all charter schools, and will encourage higher-quality processes for the approval and review of charter schools, as well as plans to shut-down charters if schools are failing to serve students well.

America's competitiveness demands a focus on the needs of our lowest-performing students and schools. Our middle- and high- schools must identify students at-risk of dropping out, and we must scale-up models that keep students on a path toward graduation. Reform in America's lowest-performing schools must be systemic and transformational. For some, partnerships and additional support can bring about change and drive improvement. Others may need to move beyond the late 19th century and expand the school day.

- The President supports a national strategy to address the dropout crisis in America's communities, and efforts to transform the nation's lowest-performing schools. 2,000 of the nation's struggling high schools produce over half of America's dropouts. The President will invest in re-engaging and recovering at-risk students, including those enrolled in the middle school grades.
- The FY 2010 budget will support the development and scaling of effective dropout prevention and recovery models – such as transfer schools that combine education and job training for high school students that are far behind.
- President Obama supports the acceleration of America's lowest-performing schools, and will make a robust investment toward recovery for schools failing standards under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Restoring America's Leadership in Higher Education

Our competitiveness abroad depends on opening the doors of higher education for more of America's students. The U.S. ranks seventh in terms of the percentage of 18-24 year olds enrolled in college, but only 15th in terms of the number of certificates and degrees awarded. A lack of financial resources should never obstruct the promise of college opportunity. And it's America's shared responsibility to ensure that more of our students not only reach the doors of college, but also persist, succeed, and obtain their degree.

- President Obama's FY 2010 budget makes a historic commitment to increasing college access and success by restructuring and dramatically expanding financial aid, while making federal programs simpler,

more reliable, and more efficient.

- The President will restore the buying power of the Pell Grant for America's neediest students and guarantee an annual increase tied to inflation. His plan will end wasteful subsidies to banks under the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) program, and re-direct billions in savings toward student aid.

- And it will dramatically simplify the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), making it easier to complete and more effective for students.

- The President supports strengthening the higher education pipeline to ensure that more students succeed and complete their college education. His plan will invest in community colleges to conduct an analysis of high-demand skills and technical education, and shape new degree programs for emerging industries.